

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

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COME-00 TRSE-00 OPIC-03 AID-05 IO-10 SAM-01 OMB-01

/080 W

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R 061652Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3256

INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

USINT BAGHDAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3044

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRD, PFOR, SA, LE

SUBJ: LEBANON-SAUDI ECONOMIC PACT EXPIRES

REF: BEIRUT 2931

1. IN DISCUSSION WITH LEBANESE FOREIGN MINISTER TAQLA
ON OTHER
MATTERS MARCH 5 I RAISED QUESTION OF EXPIRATION
LEBANESE-SAUDI ECONOMIC AGREEMENT. FOREIGN MINISTER
CONFIRMED THAT NO PROGRESS HAD BEEN MADE IN RENEWING PACT
AND HE WAS OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED.

2. FROM PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS WITH THE SAUDI AMBASSADOR,
TAQLA INDICATED THAT THE BASIC PROBLEM SEEMED TO BE LOCAL
PRESS ATTACKS AGAINST BOTH SAUDI ARABIA AND KING FAISAL.
THE FOREIGN MINISTER ENDEAVORED TO EXPLAIN TO THE
AMBASSADOR THAT LEBANON HAD A FREE PRESS, MANY OF
THE PAPERS WERE REGRETTABLY IN THE PAY OF OTHER GOVERN-
MENTS INCLUDING THAT OF SAUDI ARABIA AND CONSEQUENTLY
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ITS CAPACITY TO SUPPRESS SUCH ARTICLES WAS LIMITED.

HE ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR LEBANON ATTACHED HIGHEST IMPORTANCE TO ITS RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA AND HELD KING FAISAL IN HIGHEST ESTEEM. AS A RESULT OF THE DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE TWO MEN, TAQLA ARRANGED FOR A STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT AND THE CABINET REITERATING THE IMPORTANCE THAT THE GOL ATTACHED TO ITS RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA AND ALSO THE GREAT RESPECT WHICH IT HAD FOR FAISAL. (WE CANNOT FIND SUCH A STATEMENT.) THE AMBASSADOR, ACCORDING TO TAQLA, TOOK THIS STATEMENT AND RETURNED TO SAUDI ARABIA AND HASN'T BEEN BACK SINCE.

3. TAQLA IS OBVIOUSLY MOST ANXIOUS TO STRAIGHTEN THE PROBLEM OUT AND HAVE THE AGREEMENT RENEWED. HE IS WILLING TO DO ANYTHING REASONABLE BUT HAS MADE CLEAR THAT LEBANON WAS NOT GOING DOWN ON ITS KNEES TO OBTAIN A RENEWAL. THROUGH PERSONAL PERSUASION HE INDICATED THAT HE HAD QUIETED THE PRESS DOWN VIS-A-VIS SAUDI ARABIA. TAQLA STATED THAT HE WOULD BE MOST APPRECIATIVE OF ANYTHING THE U.S.G. COULD DO TO TRY TO PERSUADE THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT TO RENEW THE AGREEMENT AND RESTORE RELATIONS TO WHAT THEY HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY. I AGREED TO PASS HIS REQUEST ON TO MY GOVERNMENT.

4. COMMENT: AS WE HAVE POINTED OUT IN REFTTEL, THE ECONOMIC AGREEMENT IS OF CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE TO LEBANON. THE BASIC PROBLEM HERE APPEARS TO BE THAT THE SAUDIS SIMPLY CANNOT UNDERSTAND THAT A GOVERNMENT BY DEFINITION HAS ONLY LIMITED CONTROL OVER A FREE PRESS. LEBANON HAS ENOUGH PROBLEMS ON ITS PLATE AT THE MOMENT WITHOUT HAVING POOR RELATIONS WITH A COUNTRY AS IMPORTANT TO IT AS SAUDI ARABIA. IF THE DEPARTMENT AND AMBASSADOR AKINS DO FEEL IN A POSITION TO BE HELPFUL ON THIS ONE, I WOULD APPRECIATE BEING KEPT INFORMED BY AMBASSADOR AKINS ABOUT WHAT WE HAVE DONE SO THAT WE CAN SO INFORM FOREIGN MINISTER TAQLA. HOUGHTON

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